The Builder.

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1849.

THERE are three or four matters that have come before us during the week, on which we desire to say a few words to our readers; and not having left ourselves space or time to treat each of them separately, we must string them together, as we have done on some other occasions, although in truth they have not much immediate connection.

On Thursday in last week, after listening to a paper on pointed architecture, at the Society of Antiquaries, written by the veteran architect, Mr. John Adey Repton (how much a veteran was shewn by the fact, that this was the continuation of a paper commenced by him forty years ago), we looked in at the adjoining pleasant room, where the Royal Society hold their meetings, to know what was going on there. We say a pleasant room, but to our minds it is the most pleasant room in London; its old sconces and wax lights, the quiet that prevails there, the portraits which cover every inch of the walls, including at all events one great architect, the men who are occasionally to be found there dozing with dignity amidst the hum of a paper, and the mace on the table, which, before Mr. Weld scandalously destroyed the belief, by proving that Charles the Second not merely bought but paid for it, we were able to point out to a country visiter as the veritable "bauble" which Cromwell bade his soldiers "take away."—all concur to make it so.

There were very few members present—perhaps not forty—and Sir Robert Harry Inglis, bland and unctuous, with that bit of the beautiful in his button-hole in the shape of a flower, which seems as much part of his dress as his coat (and we like him for it), had by the hand a venerable looking, though not old man, and was admitting him, in the name of the Royal Society, "a fellow thereof;" and then he added a few happily chosen words, to mark his consideration of the new member—Summer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Primate of all England. Another neophyte approached, whom Sir Robert admitted as Lord John Russell, and to whom he said, in more and better words than we can remember, that he should not meet the views of the fellows if he did not add to his official duty, an earnest expression of their hope that all his lordship's efforts, as the Prime Minister of England, for the advantage of the country, might be crowned with success. The fellows regarded with no ordinary pleasure, he said, the accession of one who, he was satisfied, felt with him, that no earthly pursuit had stronger claims on the attention of all than the pursuits of science.

Our old friend the new secretary, Professor Bell, who has quite settled down into his seat, then began to read some statements of the average fall of rain during certain showers, which will doubtless be very useful when printed, but as we did not desire to have cold water thrown on the feelings which what we had seen had induced, we straightway departed, determined that our readers should have a note of it.

And surely, taken in connection with what is passing around us, and the state of other countries, this was a remarkable and significant scene, not without interest to any. While the infallible head of another church is a fugitive and an exile, and the ministers of other countries can scarce preserve the land from anarchy and spoliation,—here were the head of our church, and the prime minister of our country, quietly giving their adhesion to the cause of science, and taking their seats amongst its representatives.

On the previous evening we attended a meeting of a different character, from which we came away less satisfied. A placard on a wall in Westminster, setting forth that a lecture would be delivered to the Young Men's Missionary Association, on the 24th of January, by the Rev. John Aldis; subject—"The Connection of Idolatry and Architecture," took us to the Baptist Mission House in Moorgate-street. The library, a good room, adorned by the prize pictures of "The Baptism of Christ," concerning which much was said at the time of the competition, was filled with persons: and the reverend lecturer spoke eloquently and fluently, though we cannot say well; for his eloquence was sadly thrown away on a futile idea, and his audience must have left with their notions on the subject of architecture curiously mystified and perverted. The dogmas which he specially wished to inculcate were these: that architecture was purely idolatrous; that while Paganism had produced an architecture, Christianity had done nothing for it (our glorious cathedrals were quite forgotten), and—chief point of all, that columns in Druid, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman architecture were simply symbols of gods or their attendants! In Greek buildings, for example, he said, the columns were wholly useless, and were not put up with the view of being of use; they were the beginning and the end of the building, representatives of gods to awe the worshippers. His main proof (good lack!) he rested on this, that all the *parts* of an order were symbolical, and that surely, therefore, the leading idea, the column, was so too. Thus, he said the triglyphs were suggestions of Apollo's harp! and the flutings of the columns were to represent the folds of a robe. The Doric order, he continued, had no *pediment*, the robe was supposed to be so large as to hide it. In the Ionic the robe was less (the column, therefore, smaller), and the *pediment* was visible. For a time we could not understand what the reverend gentleman meant by saying the Doric had no *pediment*, but as he went on we came to the conclusion that he meant "pedestal," and ought to have said "base." As to the constant use of columns in absurd situations by ourselves, which he condemned (he was not quite so wrong here), we had, like many other imitators, taken up an absurdity, although we would not have originated it; but he repeated, in classical architecture columns were simply representatives of gods, and purely idolatrous.

The rev. gentleman appeared to possess the ear and entire confidence of the meeting as one of their pastors; and making all his statements not as being in any degree matters of doubt, but as received truths, they were doubtless so considered by the majority of his audience.

With a protest against such blind teaching, let us leave the speculative, however, and turn to the practical.

It is pretty evident, from the proceedings at a late Court of Sewers, reported in our present number, that the Barry-Austin controversy is one which may lead to considerable inconvenience. Now let us, by way of friendly warning, recommend the commissioners to keep themselves as much as possible out of hot water. They have clean and dirty water questions enough already on their hands, and they have a vast amount of serious business to get through, all of which will require the exercise of cool brains, and the assistance of a friendly public opinion. We have had too many occasions of late for regretting the evident infusion of a mixture of acerbity, acidity, and acridity, into certain sanitary compositions, and what appeared to us a frequent diverging from the straightforward path of business for the sake of giving an unexpected kick at some real or imaginary opponent. There is much to be objected to in the tone of Mr. Austin's report on the drainage of the new Houses of Parliament, and to some of the circumstances attending it. If he had put forward a plain statement of facts in very temperate language, he would have laid a good ground for a temperate discussion. As the matter now stands, there is too much feeling involved in it, too much making of a case, and striving for victory, for us to hope that the controversy will end very pleasantly or profitably. The new views that have been recently taken on the subject of town drainage may be wholly or partially right or wrong. It is very important to the public that their accuracy or inaccuracy should be distinctly ascertained, and that we should have the full benefit of a calm, unprejudiced investigation of the whole subject of town drainage by impartial and practical men of science, of whom there are several in the commission. If, however, the officers of the commission should be allowed to indulge in any thing approaching personalities, or should so shape their reports as to hurt in any avoidable manner the feelings of others, the consequence would be the excitement of something like party feeling, occasioning heated instead of temperate discussion, in the turmoil of which poor TRUTH might find herself flashed, or flushed, if our readers like it better, into a bottomless cesspool. Moreover, opposition to the views of the commission would be excited in numerous quarters where otherwise good will and aid might have been looked for. And though we have put the matter hypothetically, the truth is, this feeling is being excited, and an opposition is growing, and, therefore, we do most earnestly advise the commissioners to check any disposition to gladiatorial exhibition which may shew itself amongst them.

We have carefully endeavoured to steer an unbiassed course; our views, long ago and often expressed, are mainly those of the commission,—we "have done the state some service, and they know it;" but we have not the less painfully felt the injustice, as well as the impropriety in a political and in a mere gentlemanly point of view, of the apparent endeavour to cast a slur on men of standing and experience in their departments, which has been evinced by several recent publications, and which seems to have no other exciting cause than the fact, that the practice of these gentlemen and the new views are not altogether in accord. An obstinate adherence to antiquated notions clearly proved to be wrong, might justify a condemnation, which no man could be fairly required to suffer in silence, merely because he is told without proof that all his theory and practice have been based on error; but such a condemnation is doubly exasperating when it is pronounced with an assumption of infallibility on points obviously still unsettled.

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